

# Food collection comes Saturday with the mail

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Postal customers in most Santa Cruz County cities and throughout eight other area counties on Saturday will be asked to join what mail carriers are calling the largest one-day food drive in U.S. history.

As they make their rounds, carriers in Santa Cruz, Monterey and Alameda counties will collect food for various food banks. San Mateo and Santa Clara counties will collect food for distribution by the Second Harvest Food Bank to more than 800 area charities.

"It's the leanest time of the year for food banks," said Tony Cortese, president of the San Jose branch of the National Association of Letter Carriers, who helped plan the national event. "During the holidays, everybody's into giving, but in the summer months donations are not so generous. The only good meal some of the children get is in school, and during the summer months there's no school."

About 85 percent of the people who will benefit from the Saturday drive are families with children, said Steve Mangold, spokesman for the Second Harvest Food Bank.

## IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Food will be collected Saturday by postal carriers in Aptos, Capitola, Santa Cruz, Soquel and Watsonville in Santa Cruz County, and in Salinas and Castroville in Monterey County. Postal patrons will receive a flier in the mail. For more detailed information, call (800) 300-FOOD.

In 1991, San Jose was chosen as one of 10 cities nationally to participate in the pilot program. Cortese and Cambrian Park post office manager Luis Velez went to Washington to help plan the program sponsored by the carriers' union, the Postal Service and the AFL-CIO's community services unit.

In 1992, the drive was expanded nationally, and several other Santa Clara County cities joined in. This year, all 50 states will participate.

The first year, carriers locally  
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collected 100,000 pounds of food.

"We were overwhelmed by the generosity of the public," said Cortese. "It just blew us away."

And the most generous, Cortese said, are often poor people.

"People in lower-income areas can relate better to hunger," he said.

Foods needed are those high in protein, such as canned tuna, meat and vegetables, bagged beans and rice, low-fat dry milk, chili con carne, peanut butter in plastic jars and other non-perishable items.

Checks made out to Second Harvest Food Bank also will be picked up and delivered by the carriers. In addition, some post offices will have barrels in their

lobbies Saturday for food donations.

"Carriers really look forward to this extra work," Cortese said. "It's a high for them, a very rewarding feeling. They're like kids coming with Christmas gifts, saying, 'Look what I got,' as they open up their trunks. They even sort the food, and some of the stations are having barbecues at the end of the day, turning the extra work into a fun event."